

# The Many Faces of Grace

31 stories of God's extraordinary grace  
working in the lives of ordinary people

Compiled and edited by  
John Robinson

## **The Many Faces of Grace**

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# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Anne Anderson	Tim Robinson
Judy Anderson	Dorothy Stevenson
Jill Andrews	David Tey
Warren Andrews	Kathryn van Langenberg
Margaret Boyd	Peter West
Darrell Merrington Brown	Tim Whitehead
Fiona Burrows	Jack Wilson
Alice Clift	Meralyn Zimmer
Sophia Dang	
Lesley Deitenbach	
Michael Falcon	
Anita Geldenhuis	
Dorothy Hodge	
Angas Holmes	
Marian Holmes	
Anne Hyde	
Ken Knight	
Catherine Leung	
Jean McFarlane	
Bernadette Milsted	
Val Noble	<b>Editorial team</b>
Darshini Parnavitana	Simon Mossman
John Robinson	John Robinson
Krissy Robinson	Jeanette Wood

## PREFACE

*The Many Faces of Grace* is best seen as a story book – a collection of thirty-one real life stories of God at work in the lives of ordinary people. Each of these stories has been linked with a brief Bible reading and prayer so that they can be read in one month by following a daily devotional format.

Although each of us has a unique story to tell, bringing our stories together helps us to see and celebrate the many ways our creative God is at work in our midst. This diverse collection of stories is designed to help us better appreciate the many different aspects of God's grace.

God's grace is most simply defined as unearned or unmerited favour. But, as we will see, the favour and goodness of God can be experienced in an endless number of ways!

Profound thanks needs to be extended to all the contributors who are named on the previous page. This book is built around their willingness to courageously share their stories with us.

May God use this book to help us take in the extravagant dimensions of His grace towards us,

**John Robinson**

*Pastor for Discipleship & Training*

*Syndal Baptist Church*

Day 1

## THE GRACE THAT FLOWS FROM PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.  
Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and shun evil.  
This will bring health to your body  
and nourishment to your bones.  
Honour the Lord with your wealth,  
with the first fruits of all your crops;  
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,  
and your vats will brim over with new wine.  
Proverbs 3:5–10 (NIV)*

### *Jack's story*

**It was around 8.45 a.m. on a Friday morning in March 1978, and I was standing in front of the mirror just inside the open door of the motel room at Glenelg beach in Adelaide. My room-mate was packed and ready to leave. I could hear him talking to some of our teammates outside on the walk-way.**

We had been in Adelaide for a week as members of the Victorian Interstate Side contesting the Australian Lawn Bowls Interstate Teams Championship.

It had been a hard week of competition between over 100 of Australia's top bowlers, under hot and trying conditions. We were looking forward to going home.

As I knotted my tie, I heard the voice of our team manager call out, "Has anyone seen Jack Wilson?" I can recall fleetingly thinking, "What does he want me for?", just before he came through the door.

"Can you get four or five weeks off in August?" he asked. Not realising what he was saying to me, I replied, "Why would I want five weeks off in August?", to which he answered, "Because you are going to Canada!"

Then the penny dropped! I had been selected as one of seven players to represent Australia in the Lawn Bowls at the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, Canada.

Sure, I had known the Australian side for the Games was to be chosen the previous night, but I had never once considered the possibility I might be selected for it.

I sat alone on the edge of my bed for a few minutes before people started coming in to speak to me. The past 12 months or so of my bowling activities flashed across my mind and my first reaction was to offer a prayer of thanks to my God for His faithfulness and goodness to me.

Only 12 months earlier, I wasn't even in the Victorian State Side. At that time the selectors arranged a trial game for players under consideration and informed us that any player failing to participate in the trial would not be considered for selection.

I had previously made a commitment to take a missionary on furlough from Japan to a deputation visit in Moe on the day of the trial. I knew that I possibly could have made alternative arrangements to free myself of that commitment, but after much heart-searching on the subject of priorities, I declined the trial invitation and journeyed to Moe as planned.

Imagine, then, my surprise to find myself selected in the Victorian Side as Captain of one of the teams. From that point, I never looked back until finally, some nine or ten months later, I was chosen to represent my country – the pinnacle for any Australian sportsman.

That moment of supreme sporting thrill is a very emotional experience. I was quite overwhelmed and had to fight to compose myself on that bedside as I realised how my life had changed from that pivotal moment. I firmly believed then, as I do now in retrospect, that this God-enabled opportunity had all stemmed from a decision on priorities which I had taken some 12 months previously.

Although it is not always an easy matter for a committed Christian to keep the proper priorities, God's surprising and overwhelming grace often flows when we put first things first.

I thank God for my sport which I love and enjoy, but I constantly pray it will ever be a servant, not a master.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Many Faces of Grace*

*God of all wisdom, help me not to lean on my own understanding, but to trust You with all of my heart and to honour You with all my decision-making. Lord, help me to give You the first and the best in my life.*

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the surprising grace that flows when I am in step with You – when I am obedient to the ways You are leading and guiding. Help me to listen and obey You in each situation that presents itself today,*

*Amen.*

## THE GRACE THAT'S KNOWN BEFORE IT'S NAMED

*O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.  
You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.  
Before a word is on my tongue  
you know it completely, O Lord.  
You hem me in—behind and before;  
you have laid your hand upon me.  
My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,  
your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.  
Psalm 139:1–5, 15–16 (NIV)*

### *Sophia's story*

**I had no clue about Jesus when I was growing up.** It wasn't until my cousin showed me a picture book about Jesus' life that my life turned a new page.

Growing up in Vietnam I was raised with ancestor worship, but never heard anything about Christianity. My one link to this new faith was at Christmas times shared with my cousin. Each Christmas

my cousin would open a picture book about Jesus to help explain this celebration. Although I didn't yet put all the pieces together, a seed was planted that would later prove to be life-changing.

In June 2003, I was asked to sit a high school entrance exam to a selective school, which was my parents' dream for me. I was so nervous and so desperate in the literature exam that I found myself praying to this Jesus. I wasn't sure what to say, or if I was doing it right, but the incredible mark I received made me certain that Jesus does exist and that He can help us.

Six months later, this young and raw faith was tested.

All alone in our home (my father was across the other side of the country) I awoke to a knock at the door. Upon opening the door I received the news that my mother had been in a serious motorbike accident. At the hospital the doctor informed me that there was not much he could do. Because there had been brain trauma, and a significant loss of blood, he would have to operate with no guarantees.

This was the second time I prayed:

*Dear Jesus, I know you exist. You answered my prayer. I pray for my mum, who I really love and care about. She is in a dangerous situation. I don't want her to die. Please help us. Amen.*

Within hours another miracle had happened in my life. My mum was alive and well!

It was not until the end of 2004 that I met a Christian group of American students who introduced me to the Bible. It was great to be able to put names and words to what I had already experienced by God's grace.

To cut a long story short, by the end of 2006 both my mother and father joined me in making a decision to be baptised as followers of Jesus.

As a follower of Jesus I have continued to face many challenges. My move to Australia to study in the past year has continued to stretch my faith and trust in God. However, Jesus continues to be my faithful guide, provider and friend as I seek to navigate my way through the many changes associated with entering a new culture.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Lord Jesus, sometimes I don't know how to pray. Thanks that You understand. Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely. Thank You that You go ahead of me, and that Your grace is always present and active before I even recognise it and name it. Help me to step into the grace-filled day I pray, confident that You hem me in behind and before,*

*Amen.*



## THE GRACE THAT'S RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES

*Let all that I am praise the Lord;  
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.  
Let all that I am praise the Lord;  
may I never forget the good things he does for me.  
He forgives all my sins  
and heals all my diseases.  
He redeems me from death  
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.  
He fills my life with good things.  
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!  
Psalm 103:1–5 (NLT)*

### *Tim's story*

**My lawnmower had seen better days.** But now, it was running so badly that the only way to keep it going at all was to press the primer button every three metres. It is possible that my neighbours found this sight deeply amusing.

I may be the least mechanically-talented person in the world, but finally I decided that, since nothing I could possibly do could make things worse, it was time to try to fix it. Amazingly, after pulling the mower apart, I found the problem and repaired it. I was completely surprised but also pretty excited about this.

The sense of achievement lasted for at least 20 minutes. Then the wheels fell off. Literally.

The front axle detached itself from the chassis and the blades smashed one of the wheels in half before shuddering to a stop. It was time to accept that the lawn simply was not getting mowed that day.

That particularly frustrating afternoon is a fairly good illustration of how I felt throughout the whole of 2008. It seemed like no matter how hard I worked to overcome one obstacle, the next one would come along immediately, and it would be bigger. I ended up feeling like no matter what I did, I was never going to achieve anything.

With two days to go before Christmas, I was feeling no peace, no joy, and a distinct absence of goodwill towards anyone! I was tired, depressed, grumpy and fed up. It was at this low point that I received a note from a friend who had been trying to find a Christmas present for me. It said this:

*'I thought and I thought and I thought about what to get him. You know, he has it all. He has a lovely wife and two beautiful boys. They have a house, they have fun times, lots of laughs and they use "dude" all the time. He has his religious faith ... What more does this man need?'*

These words totally reframed my life!

I had become so focused on just struggling through each day that I had lost sight of all the good things in my life. With a few simple words, my friend reminded me of what was most important. I don't think I can overstate just how great an effect this had.

It meant that I could relax and enjoy a lovely Christmas Day with my family.

It meant that when, a few days later, I stood and watched my beautiful boys and their three best friends building sandcastles and

jumping in the waves and giggling, I could stop everything and simply treasure the moment.

It even meant that when more problems came along, as they always will, I could still remember to be thankful for everything that is good in my life.

It was Adrian Plass who once wrote that, *'Sometimes a miracle is just the tiny puff of wind that makes it possible to keep toiling at the oars'*.

My friend's words were, in that sense, truly miraculous.

\* \* \* \* \*

*God of every good gift, help me to never take for granted the grace that is right under my nose. Lord, help me to recognise Your presence in the small details of each day. Help me to remember that it might be through a small gesture or kind word that I, too, can be a face of grace to those You bring across my path today,*

*Amen.*



## THE GRACE THAT'S MORE AMAZING THAN WE IMAGINE

*My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in.*

*And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.*

*God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.*

*Ephesians 3:14–21 (MSG)*

### *Darshini's story*

Her pulse was failing, her heartbeat weakening. Every now and again the doctor would check the back of her neck or pick up her hand and glance at the pale blue of her nails – I sat there beside my six-year-old daughter talking to her as she teetered between consciousness and oblivion.

Every now and then I would talk to my Lord and say, “Lord please take her away. Her little body has suffered enough.”

Our little girl Samantha had contracted a virus which caused her to haemorrhage – it was a couple of days before we realized that she was bleeding internally. Upon discovering what was going on, the Paediatrician rushed her to intensive care. Within minutes she was on a blood transfusion and a drip with the necessary medications. By this time her temperature was up to 105 degrees, and she had to be wrapped in ice packs. The doctor then gave her a shot of Adrenalin near her heart.

As time went on, a vigil of four specialists, the nurses and myself gathered around Samantha's bed – watching, waiting and praying. My husband Ray was outside with a friend, shocked and silent.

I was told to keep talking to Sam to prevent her from lapsing into total unconsciousness. About this time my mother walked in and tapped me on the shoulder and said “Aunty Malini is here, she would like to see Sam.” There was a “No Visitors” board on the door, so I hesitated. But my mother insisted gently that she should come in.

I still see this vision of Aunty Malini walking into the room. A Beautiful woman in her sixties, she placed her hands on my shoulders reassuringly and said “Do you mind if I pray Darshini?” She then walked to the bed placed both her hands on Sam's head and said very clearly, “*Save this child Lord, for Your own glory save this child. By Your precious Blood save this child.*”

My whole being was in its weakest state, but I was at that moment, intensely aware of how I had underestimated the grace and power of the God I loved. I also realized how strong and positive Aunty Malini's faith was. When she repeated these words two or three times,

Samantha opened her eyes and turned her head for the first time in two days. She looked up at the face above her. Almost immediately the fever began to subside and the life that seemed to be ebbing was returned to her little body – a tangible expression of God's Grace. The life of our daughter returned to us.

Ray and I are profoundly aware that God has a plan for each of us. We have, and we always will, accept whatever comes in His strength. But I was acutely aware of my own human frailty which led me to keep saying, "... take her away Lord." However, that was not my decision – it was His.

When we were in Sri Lanka a couple of months ago, I walked into Aunty Malini's house one evening. I heard this lovely voice singing "fill thou my life ..." There she was, seated by herself, waiting for her daughter to come back home. She's totally blind now, but thirty years later she is still a picture of serenity, filled with His amazing grace.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Lord, as I sit here now, I seek to open the door and invite  
You in. Generous God, help me to plant both of my feet  
firmly on Your love, and help me to become more aware of  
the extravagant dimensions of Your grace. Lord, forgive me  
for underestimating Your power and strength. Please remind  
me that You can do more than I could ever imagine, guess  
or request. Help me to step into this day more attuned to the  
ways Your Spirit is deeply and gently at work within me,  
Amen.*